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St. Louis District

News Release

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Four Corps of Engineers lakes reducing services for 2008

Lake Shelbyville, Shelbyville, IL: Four lake projects operated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, St. Louis District, are announcing reduced recreation service levels this summer. Flat-to-declining budgets are dictating reductions at Mark Twain Lake in Mo., and Shelbyville, Carlyle and Rend Lakes in Ill.

Even after reducing services, Corps managers point out that they will start the 2008 recreation season with 92 percent of campgrounds open until after the July 4th weekend, 85 percent until after Labor Day weekend and 75 percent will remain open until the season's end. Similar figures are cited for beaches, picnic shelters and boat ramp lanes. In addition, the four lakes offer state park facilities that are not affected by the Corps budget reductions.

According to St. Louis Operations Chief Peggy O'Bryan, "We have worked with flat, to slightly declining budget numbers for several years. We identified economies and deferred maintenance to continue to support the recreation program," she said. But while funding has remained flat, each year there have been small, but accumulating increases in salaries as well as costs of contracted services and supplies. "Some items like utilities and fuels have doubled and tripled through this period," she noted.

District Commander Col. Lewis F. Setliff III directed that public health and safety must continue to have top priority and no changes would jeopardize that. He also directed that the District continue to minimize impacts on the people who use these lakes. He stated that managers must balance historic usage figures and the geographical distribution of Corps facilities, with the similar facilities and assistance the Corps gets from partners that share these lakes such as the states of Missouri and Illinois.

The heaviest impacts are being felt at two Corps Lakes. At Carlyle Lake, some campgrounds and facilities will open on schedule but close early. At Rend Lake, South Marcum Campground and the North Sandusky and North Marcum Day Use Areas will be closed all season.

Lake Shelbyville and Mark Twain Lake will operate all of their campgrounds on a normal seasonal schedule but, as at all four of the lakes, services will be reduced for visitors.

Reductions will include less frequent mowing, refuse pickup and facility cleaning. In addition, Some Visitor Centers will operate on weekends only, when demand is at its highest. Corps officials also acknowledge that support to some activities and events will have to be curtailed this year.

The Corps is realizing other savings by accepting gaps in vacated full time positions and not hiring as many of the temporary summer employees as in the past. "This will result in fewer education and water safety programs and less frequent visibility of patrolling park rangers," O'Bryan acknowledged. Roving visits by area law enforcement patrols that the Corps funds will also be reduced, although law and safety organizations and personnel will still respond to emergencies as before.

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Corps managers also acknowledge that they have no contingency funding for unexpected breakdowns. They explained that if something major breaks they will either have to identify additional cuts for repairs or do without the service until they can find other funds.

Corps managers also explained the different levels of service cuts as a function of the Federal budget process. Funds are allocated to each lake project for the broad spectrum of missions each lake has such as flood risk management, environmental stewardship and water supply. While minor adjustments can be made between those requirements at a given lake, regulations restrict moving – or reallocating – money between different projects.

The St. Louis District also notes that one of its lakes, Wapappello in southeastern, Mo., was built under the Mississippi River and Tributaries (MR&T) Program to reduce flooding after the disastrous Lower Mississippi River Flood of 1927. Since that lake is funded under the MR&T appropriation and did not experience the same budget reduction as our other lakes under the Operation and Maintenance appropriation, there will not be similar reductions there.

The St. Louis District lakes hosted some 11 million visits last year, providing regional recreational economic benefits of some \$322 million. While it's anticipated that those numbers will fall this year, with income impacts for businesses near the lakes, especially those serving seasonal or recreation needs, Corps officials say they have sought ways to minimize those losses. The various projects plan to hold public meetings in their areas to answer questions and to seek public input. They are continuing to explore greater involvement by volunteers as well as regional partners and stakeholders.

At Lake Shelbyville the largest impact will be in staff reductions such as summer hire rangers and maintenance staff. Visitors can expect to see a reduced frequency of service items such as cleaning, mowing and garbage collection. Natural Resource facilities will see a 50% reduction in migratory bird management units and wildlife food plots. The invasive species eradication program will be eliminated. Hunting opportunities are still available, call the Lake Shelbyville Natural Resource Office for more information. There will also be a decrease in interpretive programs in the campgrounds and daytime programs at the Visitor Center. Lake Shelbyville Visitor Center will operate on its normal schedule as it is staffed by volunteers. If you are interested in volunteering please contact the Lake Shelbyville staff at the number below. All reservation for the campsites at Lake Shelbyville camping areas can be made by calling 1-877-444-6777 or by Internet at <http://www.Recreation.gov>.

For more information on Lake Shelbyville, contact the US Army Corps of Engineers Project Office at: (217) 774-3951 or email us at lakeshelbyville@usace.army.mil

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